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Public Pulse

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Who Guards The Guards?

Editor of the Daily News.

I was deeply interested in your editorial, "Real Monster—Communism" in the June 16 Daily News. Yet I object mildly to the note of optimism found at the end, the prophecy that Communism cannot endure.

The course of history during this century has superficially been testimony to the remarkable survival qualities of the totalitarian system, a system of which the essentials were invented not by Marx, but by Lenin—the most astute student of power that the species has yet produced. Lenin's motives were not really so bad—he wanted to construct a utopia by the use of power. His mistake, I believe, was in failing to realize that a power struggle is in essence a competitive struggle, even more so than the laissez-faire capitalism of England during Marx's time—and competition has its own laws which, like those of laissez-faire, have no relation to the welfare of mankind.

You may have seen Darwin's "The Next Million Years" (this is a grandson of the Darwin) in which the same question was posed—the old, old question first asked by the Romans, who like ourselves had bitter experience with the problem of power: "Who is to guard the guards?" In a society in which human beings are bred for eugenic purposes, Darwin asked, how are the selectors to be selected? In a society in which welfare is imposed from above, what is to dictate the choice of dictators? And in the end, it comes down to competition, or in more generalized terms, a power struggle.

Lenin was misled, as the early eugenicists were misled, by the existence of free mass communication—the very same mass communication which confounded the predictions of Karl Marx. For one of Marx's postulates was that the government is the creation and the slave of the ruling class—and from your own experience you know this is not so. The watchdog of liberty has been the free press, and there are sound theoretical foundations for this empirical fact of observation. For ideas, in being communicated from person to person, undergo a competition for acceptance and transmission. In this competition the environment, or selecting agency, is the human mind.

Competitors are the prisoners of their system. The selecting agency is the master of that system. In the power struggle, human beings are slaves of competition, in

the competition of ideas, the collective human mind is the selecting agency, the master of the competitive system. As long as communication was free, it acted in favor of collective humanity to counteract the inimical influence of competition between human beings for power. And when Gutenberg invented mass communication in 1440, it revolutionized the history of Europe; communication acquired a control over the power struggle it had never had before. The beneficial influence of the press confounded the autocrats and the pessimists and made unreasoning optimism respectable. Contrary to Marx's predictions, it converted the government into an agent of the common man—not completely, but with increasing efficiency as time went on. By 1900 optimism (without any clear understanding) was so strong that Lenin did not even bother to ask why the "classless society" should inevitably follow his "dictatorship of the proletariat". He just took it for granted that his equivalent for providence, natural law or inevitable progress, would make things come about all right. There is considerable evidence that Lenin in his last years had serious doubts about the suitability of Stalin for his shoes.

If there is a hell, Lenin's punishment surely ought to be the understanding and the watching of the system he invented work itself out to its inevitable conclusion. For Lenin taught tyrants how to smother free communication better than it had ever been done before. Worse than that, he taught them how to use communication as a tool of power both at home and abroad. Perhaps this sort of evolution was inevitable with the accumulation of human experience; if Lenin had not invented it, Hitler or somebody else would have. But the devices Lenin constructed to enslave communication to power have been copied by every grand and petty tyrant from then on. How he must writhe as he watches mankind march into slavery directed by his utopian state!

But I do not see how any more it is possible to make statements like "Any governmental system which . . . requires mass murders . . . digs its own grave." That was not true prior to Gutenberg, and it has not been true since the October revolution. Genghis Khan deliberately butchered millions of innocent people in Indian Kharezm and in Khitai China, and got away with it. To be sure, his empire did not endure by rivalries and feuds between his successors; but this has been the history of despotism since the be-

ginning, and the successors which arose on the ruins of the Mongol Empire were no different. And also to be sure, Hitler's "thousand-year Reich" and Mussolini's second Roman Empire failed in the power struggle—but who profited from the whole business, and how much better off is the democratic world today? If there is any meaning to the above quotation, it is that the governmental system must be replaced by something better—and for this there is no evidence.

You will probably think, at this point, of Allan Dulles and his optimistic predictions that professional training in the Soviet state will force liberal institutions on the Russian. This is the last survivor of the beliefs in automatic victory that have fouled the free world up since—beliefs that dictators dared not trust their armies with real guns, that Russia's leaders would automatically come to disaster, that slaves of dictators could not fight, that the West might make up in technology what it lacked in supporters and in preparation. Certainly the technological advancement of Japan, or of Germany, was no guarantee that these states must remain liberal. This is a memory of the last century, when tyrants had not learned how to enslave communication. To stay in power, they had to depend on suppressing it—and automatically fell behind in technology. Think how wrong the West has been, time and again, in estimating the technological capacity of dictatorships!

The reason I have gone to such length about an editorial which, by and large, I thoroughly approved of is that I think unreasoning optimism is our greatest enemy in this century. If there is a salvation for us, it can only come with the acceptance, by our leaders, of an ice-cold appraisal of the facts and the magnitude of the danger—and a resultant ice-cold determination to do something about it. To gain these ends, first step is to destroy the complacent assumption of nearly all Americans that Destiny—call it God, or Providence, or Natural Law—is somehow on our side in the long run. We have paid far too much for this expensive luxury already in this century. The final installment payment is likely to be either our lives or our liberties. This is why even a modest expression of optimism from a newspaper which I deeply respect calls forth this long discourse.

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future the representatives of America's free press will declare a "cold war" against the complacency of

our public and our leaders, and demand something better than stop-gaps and off-the-cuff expedients—which remind me, as I said once, of a reluctant father dragged away from a poker game to change the baby's pants. For the free press has a lot in common with the medical profession. Our common ideal is to serve mankind—our common requirement is to face in that service the grimmest facts of life and death—and our common experience is that dramatic stories do not generally have happy endings.

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